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WHAT WAS ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S CREED?

BY GEORGE M. MC CRIE.

In the *Westminster Review* for September Mr. Theodore Stanton draws to a close the fourth of a brilliant series of articles upon Abraham Lincoln with the following words:

"A word still remains to be said about Lincoln's religious belief,—or, shall I say, non-belief? Messrs. Nicolay and Hay and Mr. Herndon devote considerable space in their Lives to this aspect of their hero. That Lincoln was an orthodox Christian nobody pretends to assert. But his friends and biographers differ as to how much of a Christian he was. If Lincoln had lived and died an obscure Springfield lawyer and politician, he would unquestionably have been classed by his neighbors among Freethinkers." (*Westminster Review*, p. 264.)

Then follows a sentence which at once recalls the Westminster Abbey ceremonial over the remains of Charles Darwin:

"But, as is customary with the church, whether Roman Catholic or Protestant, when Lincoln became one of the great of the world, an attempt was made to claim him. In trying to arrive at a correct comprehension of Lincoln's theology [?] this fact should be borne in mind in sifting the testimony." (Ibid. 264-5.)

It may be added that the "attempt" in question is generally more vehement in proportion to the scantiness of the evidence in favor of orthodoxy. And this for obvious reasons. No man thoroughly, or even mainly, "at one" with the popular religious belief of his age, requires *any* orthodox verification, or identification, after his decease. In such cases, not to have condemned current religious beliefs implies acquiescence in their reasonableness and utility. And it is just here, I think, that Mr. Stanton, in face of the very evidence, so carefully and minutely gathered by himself, comes to a wrong conclusion in Lincoln's case. I italicise in the following extract:

"Another very important warping influence which should not be lost sight of was Lincoln's early ambition for political preferment. Now, the shrewd American politician with an elastic conscience joins some church, and is always seen on Sunday in the front pews. But the shrewd politician who has *not* an elastic conscience—and this was Lincoln's case—simply *keeps mum on his religious views*, or, when he must touch on the subject, deals only in platitudes. And this is just what Lincoln did." (Ibid. p. 265.)

In support of this Mr. Stanton quotes from Herndon's "True Story of a Great Life," p. 439, as follows: "Inasmuch as he was so often a candidate for public "office, Mr. Lincoln said as little about his religious "opinions as possible, especially if he failed to coin-"cide with the orthodox world." Now, this is evidence of Lincoln's declinature to mix up religious opinions with politics, but it is evidence of nothing more. But how about the following passage, which Mr. Stanton also quotes from Herndon's "True Story," p. 446-7. "In 1854," says Mr. Herndon, "he asked me "to erase the word God from a speech which I had "written and read to him for criticism, because my "language indicated a personal God, whereas he in-"sisted no such person ever existed." This was not "keeping mum on his religious views." It was asserting the position of an *Atheos*. According to the testimony of Justice David Davis, Lincoln "had no "faith in the Christian sense of the term—had faith "in laws, principles, causes and effects." I fear also what Mrs. Abraham Lincoln says of him: "His only "philosophy was that what is to be will be, and no "prayers of ours can reverse the decree." I not only say Atheos then, in this case, but *Hylo* Atheos. Seeing that his was not mere indifference, no mere universal Scepticism or Pyrrhonism, but a self-argued-out conviction of the suffering of the Cosmos without an *Anima Mundi*, and of the human organism without an *Anima humana*.

"Lincoln thought little on theological subjects and "read still less," continues Mr. Stanton (W. R. 265). Read this in connexion with the testimony of Mr. John T. Stuart, his first law partner, quoted in the following page, and it becomes no longer remarkable. "He "[Lincoln] was an avowed and open infidel, and some-"times bordered on atheism." A distinctly two fold attitude is here indicated—infidelity towards, or rejection of, current orthodoxy and negation of, at all events, a personal Deity. Now, an honest mind, such as that of Lincoln cannot "border on" Atheism and, at the same time, show Theistic or Deistic leanings. And, this understood, a light is thereby shed on some of his utterances which might otherwise be open to misconstruction. Thus, for example, to say, as Lincoln did, according to Mr. Herndon's record, "All "such questions [moral and social reforms] must first "find lodgment with the most enlightened souls who "stamp them with their approval. *In God's own time* "[I italicise] they will be organised into law, and thus "woven into the fabric of our institutions," "(True

Story," p. 107) simply means that, *in the march of events* such and such would happen. A mere passing phrase like this can no more be construed into a profession of Theistic belief than can the slang invocation vulgarly associated with the act of sneezing. Mr. Stanton sees this and, accordingly, does not reckon with the expression in his summing up, which runs as follows:

"A man about whose theology [?] such things can be said is of course far removed from orthodoxy. It may even be questioned whether he is a theist, whether he is a deist. That he is a free-thinker is evident; that he is an agnostic is probable. Addison's line seems to fit the case: 'Atheist is an old-fashioned word: I am a free-thinker.'" (W. R. p. 266.)

This is merely playing round the fringes of the issue. "Old-fashioned words" have often a definite meaning which newer coinages lack. "Free-thinker" means anything or nothing. Thought—of the *cor cordium*—is ever unbound, though the written or spoken expression of it may be fettered. The term has no dynamic character. As well might one speak of an "Opinionist." "Agnostic," again, simply equals the *minus* sign, and has, moreover, associations of a superfine and superficial nature wholly foreign to Lincoln's sturdy personality. *Falsetto* negation is fashionable;—as a writer in the *National Reformer* (Sept. 6, 1891) neatly puts it—"Great is the virtue of a large "octavo page, good type, the words 'an agnostic,' and "the imprint of Williams and Norgate." But plain words are best. That he was *Atheos* connotes a definite attitude towards the great religionist chimæra, and, apart from some minor disadvantages of association, really defines Lincoln's position more closely than any of Mr. Stanton's epithets. It is positive not negative, indicates what the man professedly *was*, rather than what he was *not* or what he oppugned. The immemorial two-fold problem—"What *is* and what do I "know?" demands not a quibble, but a rational, definite reply. Only one synthetic system faces this two-fold issue. All Free-thinking, Agnosticism, Parkerism, etc., but palter with this supreme *creed*. And that is the Scientific Idealism which, based on the concrete, yet focuses the rays of all possible knowledge in the individual self, knower and known in one. The answer is complete only in Hylo-Idealism.

It is not necessary to stretch the point too far by crediting Lincoln with having excogitated a "world-scheme," so profoundly simple yet simply profound, from the perusal of "tomes of metaphysic lore." These in all probability would with him have confused the issue. Though he rationally apprehended it, possibly he might not have been able to give a logical reason for the faith that was in him—but his already-quoted expression points unquestionably to a solipsismal conclusion. "All such questions [moral and social re-"forms] must first find lodgment with the most en-"lightened souls who stamp them with their ap-"proval." This is *true Meliorism, from the brain outwards*, as opposed to the dream of a ready-made New Jerusalem descending from the skies. Not unnaturally, however, his formula invites amendment. For the phrase "*find lodgment with the most enlightened "souls should be substituted, spring from the most power-"ful individual intellect*," The individual Ego—not a group of Egos is the last recess of thought. It is dualism not Auto-Monism which views all Egos as on one plane. The common phrase of Secularism "One world at a time" has an inner meaning which Secularists miss. The world is to every man as it affects him—to each "a different world." That *other* Egos are in my self-created Cosmos can only be a secondary, never a primary, conclusion. With my own Cosmos I alone have to do,—but, inasmuch as it is indissolubly one with me, I apprehend the existence of other Egos. In the words of the late Miss Constance Naden "the Ego in its entirety *is* the universe as felt "and known." Empiricism has to do with the manifold—Scientific Idealism with the simple unit, including all its content and intent. But to continue. Note Lincoln's complete and significant indifference to popular religionism. Mr. Stanton furnishes us with the following instances of this (W. R. p. 265) "The text "of the greatest moral document of his Presidency, "the Emancipation Proclamation, contains, as orig-"inally drawn up in secret with his own hand, no "mention of God; and what is still more significant, "when the 'omission' was pointed out to him, by one "of his Cabinet officers, he simply incorporated into "the text the religious paragraph offered him." And again "When a convention of clergymen passed a "resolution requesting the President to recommend to "Congress an amendment to the Constitution, recog-"nising the existence of God, Lincoln prepared a first "draft of a message to this effect. 'When I assisted "him in reading the proof,'—says Mr. Defrees, Super-"intendent of Public Printing during Lincoln's ad-"ministration,—'he struck it out, remarking that he "had not made up his mind as to its propriety.'"

I emphasise these specially notable words. "*He "had not made up his mind as to its propriety.*" In plain words an affirmation that the God-idea is fathered by and comes and goes, not only with the individual consciousness, but with individual opinion as to its "propriety" in given circumstances. Could the supremacy of the individual Ego be more explicitly stated? But I need scarcely add that a Deity thus shelved or not shelved, according to the dictates of political expediency, or of individual opinion as to the "propriety" of either course, is no Deity at all. He is as fictional as the "John Doe" or "Richard Roe" of a legal

writ, and anyone making use of such a creation—the puppit not the parent, of his own Egoity—is supposed to know with what he is dealing. Orthodox religionism may well despair of Abraham Lincoln as of George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, or President Jefferson. And this being the case, we are in a position to define his life-creed with all due measure of exactness. The only possible alternatives open to a mind so sincere as his, are two in number. They are competently indicated in the following extract from a recent philosophical treatise by Professor Veitch:

"The natural outcome of the Hegelian conception on what may be called the abstract side is simply that the individual is a 'reflection,' the passing reflection of the all-comprehending substance. . . . The absolute is the flow of the individuals of time and space—thought is the thought of conscious individuals—the sum of natural law is the divine. On the other hand, as the individual contains the abstract universality, and gives it meaning and being, the supreme principle or ground of all is simply a projection of the likeness of the individual himself on the mirror of his own consciousness." ("Knowing and Being," p. 310.)

Looking at the evidence above stated, there can be no hesitation in applying Abraham Lincoln's life-persuasion to the latter category.

CONTROVERSIAL MATERIALISM, OR WHAT DO WE MEAN BY MATTER?

BY EDMUND NOBLE.

"Informatio sensus semper est ex analogia hominis non ex analogia universi; atque magno prorsus errore asseritur, sensum esse mensuram rerum." [*Bacon, Instauratio Magna.*]

Has so-called "materialism" a real, or only a controversial value? This issue has been raised anew by many recent discussions on the relation of science to religion, and it may be well to attempt at least a provisional reply to the question. It is by no means generally appreciated by those who take part in such discussions that the names they use do not in any case correspond with the things indicated by them, but are always simply representations of those things, and representations of them in terms of human knowledge. Even clever dialecticians and profound thinkers sometimes lose sight of the truth that the concepts which their terms stand for always mean and only mean, not the thing indicated in its actuality, as existing independently of them, but only that knowledge about the thing which the mind possesses at any particular stage of mental development. In any scientific view of the meaning of knowledge, we can know nothing of objects in the external world apart from the effects which they produce in us—apart from the particular way in which we, as human organisms, feel and deal with their actions upon us and upon one another. Our idea of a thing, though it may represent that thing with more or less accuracy, is thus simply made up of the effects which the thing produces in us, is no more than our way of knowing it purely special to us, and not a universal way which would be valid for every kind of organism whatsoever. Our knowledge of things has thus several important limitations. In the first place, we can only directly know such things as are capable of acting on us; secondly, we can know objects only in ways that are imposed by our own organism—that is to say, by the senses through which we directly know their qualities; thirdly, we can possess only such kind and amount of knowledge as, up to any particular time, we may happen to have accumulated. The error which most people commit by neglect of these limitations is the error of taking appearances for the things themselves, and this alone has led to some of the most serious defects of the subjective method. But there is the still graver error that has eaten its way into the fabric of all popular thinking until the wisest heads may well begin to despair of its elimination—the error, that is to say, of regarding our concept of a thing at any given period as representing the total qualities of the thing, the sum of its powers and characters, and of believing, which most of us tacitly do, that we may use our concept, as if we were dealing with the thing in its totality. Why is this an error, and why is it an error of the gravest kind? It is an error because our concept of an object has a content of qualities or characters that varies according to the stage of our mental growth. It is an error of the most serious import for thinking because, by using the concept we have at any particular stage of knowledge as representing the whole of the characters of the thing known, we are led to make assertions regarding that thing which, while seeming true for the few qualities by which we know it, are often totally untrue for the thing itself, and even for the thing as it is represented by the concept at a more advanced stage of our knowledge.

That our concept of a thing undergoes gradual increase in its content—that it begins with only a few qualities and ends with many—may be shown by the history of terms. The most simple and most salient characters of an object—characters of sound, action, color, or shape—are always the first to be known, and it is the most prominent of these which the mind describes in the act of conferring the name. Thus the ant was called "swarmer" because "swarming" was the character by which it attracted attention; serpent was so named from its "creeping" motion; heaven was regarded as a thing "heaven" up; and "sky" came into existence to indicate that which seemed to "cover" the earth. Now all these names, when first used, were alive with the meaning thus given to them; but they remained thus vital only for the early stage of man's knowledge of the objects named. For as men came to know more of the ant, the serpent, the heaven,